United Nations A/55/PV.72

General Assembly

Fifty-fifth session

Official Records

72nd plenary meeting
Monday, 27 November 2000, 3 p.m.
New York

President Mr. Holkeri ..... (Finland)

The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Agenda item 20 (*continued*)

Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance

(a) Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations:

Reports of the Secretary-General (A/55/82, A/55/494, A/55/637)

Draft resolution (A/55/L.38)

(b) Special economic assistance to individual countries or regions:

Reports of the Secretary-General (A/55/90, A/55/92, A/55/123, A/55/124, A/55/125, A/55/212, A/55/317, A/55/319, A/55/333, A/55/347, A/55/415, A/55/416, A/55/418, A/55/620)

Draft resolutions (A/55/L.16, A/55/L.35, A/55/L.36, A/55/L.41)

(c) Assistance to the Palestinian people

Report of the Secretary-General (A/55/137)

Mr. Valdivieso (Colombia) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset of this new century, we must face the prospect of an increasing number of humanitarian emergencies in various parts of the world.

In the 1990s 4 million people lost their lives in conflicts, and every year 150,000 perish in natural disasters. It therefore falls to the international community, which we represent, to examine its ability to respond to this challenge, and the United Nations is the most appropriate intergovernmental forum for all countries providing and receiving assistance to meet and voice their own views on this question.

We are expected to review from time to time the policy guidelines for our Organization's provision of assistance, to monitor the correct use of available resources and to promote coordination among United Nations bodies and between them and other humanitarian actors in the world. It is clear that the major humanitarian emergencies of the last decade, such as those in the Horn of Africa, the Balkans, Central Africa, the Caribbean and Central America, have awakened in the general public of all countries a great desire to support international relief efforts.

At least three effects flow from this fact: first, a substantial increase in resources for international assistance, estimated at $4.5 billion for 1998 alone; secondly, a proliferation of humanitarian organizations; and, thirdly, the need to improve coordination of relief efforts.

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I would like to present the views of my delegation in connection with coordination. In order to be brief, I will omit a reading of the sections on resources and the increase in humanitarian actors, which are in the text distributed in the Hall.

In our view, the challenge for the coordination of humanitarian assistance today does not reside in coordinating the action of organizations operationally, such as in food delivery, medical care or the provision of temporary dwellings, as important as these components may be. It lies, rather, in integrating the focus of assistance with rehabilitation programmes after conflicts or disasters as part of a long-term strategy to provide for the sustainable development of affected communities. In other words, humanitarian assistance must be more closely integrated with development aid programmes.

We are aware that various multilateral agencies and bilateral programmes have recognized this need and are exploring various options to address this situation. Mention can be made, by way of example, of the so-called Brookings process, in which the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the World Bank, among others, participate to expand care for refugees.

The fact is that we are living in times of recurrent emergencies as a result either of conflicts or of natural forces, and good approaches to integrate efforts have become a vital need. We appeal for humanitarian assistance to be used to create a positive environment for rehabilitation or reconciliation in affected countries, leading to long-term development after emergencies.

As for the Economic and Social Council humanitarian affairs segment, my delegation regrets that it did not reach agreed conclusions last July. We consider that we lost an opportunity to introduce new elements to guide United Nations humanitarian assistance, which, since 1991, has followed the terms set forth in resolution 46/182. We hope to resume a substantive dialogue at next year's segment in Geneva.

I would like to highlight two valuable aspects of the text of conclusions that was under negotiation.

First, there are the links between technology and natural disaster prevention and management. For countries like Colombia and, generally speaking, for the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, which are prone to the effects of earthquakes, floods, hurricanes and other destructive natural forces, technology could help improve early detection of risks and improve national and regional capacity to respond to emergencies.

In the Economic and Social Council, my delegation, speaking as interim secretariat of the Rio Group, presented the criteria guiding regional cooperation in this field.

Secondly, at the Economic and Social Council meetings we recognized the need to adopt a systematic and transparent approach to provide assistance for internally displaced persons during complex emergencies, although agreement was not reached on the terms of this kind of assistance. This approach should enable affected countries to benefit from existing capabilities within the United Nations for assisting internally displaced persons, with respect for the principles of humanitarian assistance, international human rights law and international humanitarian law.

In our view, there is a dynamic relationship between humanitarian assistance, the protection of civilians and the reconstruction of affected societies, which we must continue to explore in order to reach positive conclusions.

My country, which is a legitimately constituted democracy with extensive popular participation, is experiencing conflict with violent groups of all kinds that are intent on imposing their will by force of arms, thus creating a flow of a large number of displaced Colombians in recent years. Several United Nations organizations, as well as representatives of the International Committee of the Red Cross, of friendly Governments and of non-governmental organizations, are providing support to the efforts of our own Government to cope with this humanitarian emergency.

We have presented a number of initiatives to the international community for short- and long-term actions. One of them is aimed at benefiting 58,000 displaced families during the period 2000 to 2002. Support is to be given for their early return to their places of origin, for economic stabilization in current locations or for voluntary relocation in different parts of the country. Moreover, legislation passed in 1998 to respond to this phenomenon makes it possible for internally displaced persons to form their own organizations to petition local and national authorities and utilize funds from foreign humanitarian assistance.

I would not wish to end my intervention without recognizing the humane qualities and personal merits of United Nations personnel engaged in humanitarian assistance activities in various countries around world. Their service to humanity and their actions to bring relief to thousands of innocent victims merit our admiration and acknowledgement. There are two related matters in this regard that are of concern to our delegation, namely, unrestricted access by humanitarian personnel to populations in need and the existence of a secure environment for the discharge of their duties. Colombia would like to express its firm rejection of violent acts committed anywhere in the world to prevent the basic right of any person to benefit from humanitarian assistance. Armed groups that deliberately obstruct the provision of food to defenceless populations in zones of conflict are violating clear norms of international humanitarian law. The international community as a whole should condemn that practice. Furthermore, we deeply regret the growing number of humanitarian workers who have lost their lives in recent years while performing their duties, who were confined to prisons or who disappeared under uncertain circumstances.

We thank the Secretary-General for his report on this subject contained in document A/55/494. We support his proposal for short-term budgetary measures to improve the security of personnel. We nevertheless want to express our complete disagreement over the inclusion of a Colombian citizen's name in the list contained in annex II of the report, which lists the names of civilian personnel who lost their lives in the previous year while on duty overseas. That person's connection with a technical cooperation project run by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in our country did not mean that there was a working connection with the United Nations or the Government of Colombia — a fact explicitly set out in his contract for provision of services. The attack that led to his death was widely condemned in our country, and the circumstances of that crime are currently being investigated by the judiciary authorities. Nevertheless, the inclusion of his name on the list of United Nations casualties throughout the world and the description of the incident as an attack against the personnel of the Organization were mistakes, which is why we believe the report was drafted in haste. We have therefore requested the administration of UNDP to issue a correction to that information.

We believe it is important that as many countries as possible ratify the 1994 Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel. My country is currently making progress towards adherence to the Convention. We believe that the ratification of the Convention will contribute to clearly determine State responsibility vis-a-vis the various categories of United Nations personnel, as well as to harmonize national and international legislation on this question.

Allow me to conclude by saying that the humanitarian issues of our day have gained greater prominence on States' political agendas and on the agendas of international security, sustainable development, human rights and foreign policy. As a result of this fact, initiatives have been made, both inside and outside the United Nations, to enlarge the scope of humanitarian action to include not only assistance issues, but also those related to the protection for civilians and the economic rehabilitation of affected persons.

We are ready to participate in that dialogue with great humane spirit and respect for the views of other countries in a dialogue over this question and its international repercussions for all in the new century.

Mr. Krokhmal (Ukraine): Allow me to express my delegation's great appreciation to the Secretary-General for his reports on the agenda item under consideration. Those reports faithfully reflect the ongoing efforts of the United Nations system to address the increasing gamut of humanitarian assistance issues. We are particularly grateful for document A/55/82, which clearly identifies the challenges involved in managing complex emergency responses, while emphasizing the role of technology in mitigating the effects of natural disasters and other emergencies. The activities initiated by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) under the leadership of Ms. McAskie in her capacity as Emergency Relief Coordinator ad interim also deserve our full support and appreciation.

My delegation would like to stress the importance of the Secretary-General's disaster response initiatives, which he announced in his millennium report. I would like to refer specifically to the "first-on-the-ground" disaster response initiative, which is aimed at providing modern telecommunications for humanitarian relief officers in areas affected by natural disasters and emergencies.

We entirely share the conclusion made in the report contained in document A/55/82 that the international community has made progress in addressing humanitarian emergencies. At the same time, capacity to respond to the unprecedented number and size of such emergencies all over the world in recent years has been limited. The events in Kosovo, East Timor, Mozambique and other hot spots, as well as recent natural disasters in Turkey, India and other countries, underscore the need to increase the capacity of humanitarian agencies; to further strengthen preparedness to respond to emergencies; and to improve the efficiency and coordination of international humanitarian assistance. The lessons learned in responding to such emergencies call for closer cooperation among all actors providing humanitarian assistance, including Governments, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations, the Red Cross movement and civil society. We acknowledge the primary role of the United Nations in the coordination of international humanitarian assistance in crisis prevention and in the mitigation of the consequences of crises.

We share the view of other delegations that, in responding to conflict situations, increased emphasis should be placed on the needs of displaced persons. The number of persons displaced within their own countries is increasing dramatically, and now constitutes almost twice the figure for refugees. According to estimates of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), there are some 20 to 25 million internally displaced persons in the world, the majority of whom live under precarious conditions. That crisis has affected some 20 to 25 million people in over 50 countries and in literally every region of the world.

The High Commissioner for Refugees, Mrs. Sadako Ogata, rightly emphasized the imperative need of integrating the protection of displaced persons into a long-term strategy aimed at a lasting solution to displacement crises. To that end, a strong political commitment from all parties concerned is indispensable, including the humanitarian agencies of the United Nations. In that regard, we support the efforts to strengthen the central role of the Emergency Relief Coordinator and the resident humanitarian coordinator.

The plight of internally displaced persons remains one of the most serious humanitarian, human rights, political and security problems confronting the global community. The issue of assistance to them is a complex and sensitive one. It requires the development of a comprehensive normative framework. In this connection, we support the established international practice of assistance to internally displaced persons provided by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and other humanitarian agencies. Ukraine also welcomes the initiatives of the United Nations Development Programme and other United Nations agencies, including the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the World Bank, to work out the new approach aimed at helping such persons resume productive lives in the areas where they reside and to provide an opportunity, through income-generating and other projects, to build skills and self-reliance, thus bridging the gap between humanitarian relief and development assistance.

However, the first obstacle that threatens to undermine the provision of humanitarian assistance is the lack of resources and, to some extent, the inappropriate allocation of available funds. In view of the increasing number of natural disasters and other emergencies, the current resources are insufficient to deal with them. While the resources available for emergency relief are generally abundant, those for long-term efforts have tended to decrease.

The international community demonstrates its generosity when it mobilizes to help victims during acute moments of humanitarian crises. At the same time, the effects of those emergencies are felt long after they have taken place. It is also essential to attract the international community's attention to reconstruction and development issues and the prevention of humanitarian catastrophes.

We believe that the international community should further realize that international cooperation in early warning and disaster mitigation needs to focus more on the early warning, preparedness and relief capacities of disaster-stricken countries. That would allow those States to prepare for possible emergencies beforehand and to respond promptly to situations when disasters strike.

The primary responsibility for the coordination and implementation of humanitarian assistance in dealing with the consequences of natural disasters lies with affected States. Therefore, an important measure for strengthening efforts in humanitarian and disaster

relief is the improvement of national capacities, especially of civil institutions, to respond to the full range and the different types of emergencies.

We believe that one of the central aspects of humanitarian assistance — staff security — has been recently integrated into the consolidated appeals process; this should be strengthened. The safety of humanitarian personnel is a precondition for carrying out effective humanitarian operations. In this regard, we call on all States to accede to the Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel and to implement the proposals and recommendations of the Secretary-General on the scope of the legal protection under the Convention. We believe that these actions will protect populations and help to end serious violations of international humanitarian law.

A major focus of the humanitarian segment of the Economic and Social Council this year was the harnessing of new technology to support national efforts in disaster response. Rapid advances in technology put demands on the humanitarian agencies, which have to monitor technological advances and take full advantage of the technological resources. Such innovations as the geographical information system and the Global Positioning System would help to identify emergency sites, risks and damage. Better use should also be made of communication tools to enable immediate dissemination of information and the networking of those operating in the humanitarian sector. The value of the latest achievements of information technology in the mitigation of the effects of natural or man-made disasters cannot be questioned. We share the concern of other delegations with regard to the necessity for transfers of the relevant technology to enable interested nations, in particular developing countries, to respond more effectively to disasters.

While the Economic and Social Council was unable this year to adopt an agreed set of conclusions, we think that it has made considerable progress in addressing the issue. As the President of the Council, Ambassador Wibisono, rightly underlined,

> "Recognizing the valuable activities of the United Nations in the field of humanitarian assistance over the past year, we must continue to fulfil our commitment to strengthen the role of the Organization in this regard. At the same time, it has become clear that the Council is increasingly committed to ensuring that the segment's guidelines are effectively implemented by the United Nations system at large."

Ukraine attaches great significance to regional cooperation in this specific area, since neighbouring countries are most often the best source of timely humanitarian assistance in emergencies. Ukraine has signed a series of international agreements and memoranda in this field with most of its neighbours, as well as with the United States, Canada, Greece and other countries. The key elements of international cooperation in my country are joint programmes with the United Nations, the European Council and European Union, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the Central European Initiative, other organizations, and the development of international bilateral contacts.

In this connection, we highly appreciate the European Coordination Programme (ECP), launched by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs at the request of a number of European States. Based on dialogue and action to facilitate the development of a sound regional policy environment, the ECP process has a major role to play in generating effective and efficient international humanitarian action in Europe. We consider the Fribourg Forum, held in June this year, an important step towards ensuring a sound regional policy environment for effective and efficient international humanitarian assistance in Europe and the Newly Independent States region. Ukraine fully supports the thrust and main objectives contained in the Fribourg Communiqué and Framework for Action.

The Government of Ukraine highly appreciates the United Nations activities aimed at fostering cooperation in the field of the elimination of the consequences of the Chernobyl catastrophe. We would like to pay tribute to the United Nations Chernobyl Coordinator, Ms. McAskie, and her predecessor, Mr. de Mello, who during the last two years have been multiplying their efforts to revitalize the Chernobyl-related United Nations activities, by defining a new strategy based on a better-prioritized assistance programme, increased local coordination and a more targeted approach in public information and resource mobilization. Fully understanding the concern of the international community over the Chernobyl nuclear power plant, still working almost 15 years after the catastrophe, Ukraine has taken the decision to decommission it on 15 December of this year.

In this connection, my delegation, together with Belarus and the Russian Federation, as well as the delegations of Azerbaijan, India, Moldova and Turkey, put forward a draft resolution on the agenda item under consideration to welcome this event. We call upon other delegations to support the draft resolution on the closure of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant.

In conclusion, allow me to touch upon another important issue which is also of great concern for Ukraine, namely the impact of the Kosovo conflict, which continues to cause considerable economic losses, associated above all with the extremely severe repercussions of the conflict on trade and economic relations in the region and on navigation along the Danube.

The losses resulting from the Kosovo conflict exacerbated the economic problems associated with the major financial crises of 1997-1998 and with the consequences of the protracted economic sanctions imposed on Yugoslavia since 1992. Restricted navigation along the Danube brought to a standstill the work of a number of Ukraine's shipping companies, which used to transport cargo along this important international waterway. The Ukrainian Danube Shipping Company incurred losses amounting to $110 million, and is currently losing about $300,000 a day.

The continued functioning of Ukraine's transport infrastructure on the Danube is directly dependent on the full resumption of navigation along the river. Even partial resumption will not make it possible to stabilize the situation, since the main customers of Ukrainian carriers and ports are located beyond the destroyed Yugoslav bridges, which have blocked the passage of vessels along the Danube.

Unfortunately, despite the decisions taken by the General Assembly, assistance to the affected States in their efforts to overcome the negative consequences of the recent events in the Balkans has not been sufficient. My delegation places particular emphasis on the provisions of the relevant resolution regarding economic reconstruction, development and cooperation, including economic cooperation in the region and between the region and the rest of Europe. We believe that their effective implementation would improve trade relations and promote trade, private-sector development and foreign direct investment; attract resources for financial assistance to infrastructure projects; and provide macroeconomic support for implementation of the economic reforms.

In this connection, the delegations of Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, the United States of America and Ukraine have put forward for the Assembly's consideration another draft resolution on special economic assistance to the Eastern European States affected by the recent developments in the Balkans, in which the international community is called upon to continue to pay special attention to the needs of those countries.

Mr. Darwish (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): The Egyptian delegation would like at the outset to express its gratitude to the Secretary-General for his reports on the various agenda items before us. Egypt believes that the time has come to consider the question of the safety and security of humanitarian personnel and that we must take a firm stance vis-à-vis all those who threaten it.

These practices have been condemned by international law as well as by the International Criminal Court, in whose Statute they are included. This represents a positive step towards ensuring the protection of the personnel concerned, which will serve to deter any persons who might wish to commit such crimes. We appeal to all parties to armed conflicts to respect the rights of humanitarian assistance workers as well as the principles of the Charter of the United Nations; the rules, traditions and culture of the host country; and the principles enshrined in resolution 46/182 of 1991.

Egypt consequently asks that humanitarian personnel be given access to the civilian population — to all the men, women and children who are in need in the various States concerned. This must be done in a legal and sound way — by giving prior consent to the organizations providing humanitarian assistance. This will make it possible for them to accomplish their mission.

The Egyptian delegation stresses that humanitarian assistance can in no way harm the territorial integrity of host States. While completely understanding the problems of certain States that do not have a central government that establishes law and order, we ask the General Assembly to set guidelines to be followed by the United Nations in such cases in a transparent way, so that all States, large and small, can participate.

Egypt followed with great interest the humanitarian segment of the thematic section of the Economic and Social Council, and notes that all States participated in the debates on natural disasters, whose harmful effects touch a large part of the world's population. We also followed the debate on displaced persons.

The debate on natural disasters commanded a consensus. Nonetheless, on the question of displaced persons, differences of opinion emerged. Different stands were taken by countries in this respect, which made it impossible to consider the question in depth.

A working group was established, under the chairmanship of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on displaced persons, but agreement could not even be reached on the meaning of the term "displaced person". Some wanted the term to include foreigners living within a certain state. We feel, however, that the term applies to citizens of a country who are forced into exodus as a result of emergency conditions. The protection of these displaced persons is the responsibility of the State concerned, and it is the role of the international community to provide assistance when the State concerned requests it. Those who live on the territory of a foreign state should enjoy the same rights as the citizens of that state. Nonetheless, those rights cannot be completely comparable to the rights of the citizens of such a state. For instance, there are some industrialized countries that do not give legal immigrants the rights that their citizens enjoy. Consequently, calling on countries that are affected by the phenomenon of displaced persons to give the same rights to those people as to their own citizens is a request that, in our view, is illogical.

In any event, last summer's discussions showed that it is preferable to consider these questions in the framework of guiding principles and not simply to take note of them in the Commission on Human Rights in Geneva. Many States believe that there is no international adherence to these principles and that the Secretariat of the United Nations should therefore not hastily include them in policies of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee. This led to the complications that we all witnessed last summer. In the face of this very complex situation, we take favourable note of the Under-Secretary-General's intention to continue consulting with Member States in order to include their views in these principles.

The peace process in the Middle East is now facing threats that have created a tragic situation for the Palestinian people. The international community cannot remain silent or inactive in the face of Israeli intervention and aggression against the Palestinians and the peace process. We had hoped that a page in this conflict had already been turned and that peace could be founded on the basis of relevant Security Council resolutions and of the principle of land for peace. We call on the international community to commit itself once again; to convey a clear message to Israel on the need to respect the human rights of the Palestinians; and to condemn Israel's military actions, operations and abuses, which run counter to its declared intention to work for a just and comprehensive peace.

The international community must therefore adopt a clear position and not use double standards. It would be a moral and political mistake to behave otherwise and could cost the United Nations its credibility and legitimacy in this century, which we hope to see unblemished by such errors.

In conclusion, on behalf of the Egyptian delegation, we wish sincerely to thank all the United Nations agencies that work in difficult circumstances in Palestinian territory and that contribute effectively to the capacity-building of the Palestinian Authority. I also thank the States of the European Union for their annual resolution on this subject, which is of growing importance in the current circumstances in the Middle East. On behalf of Egypt, I appeal to all donor countries to respect their commitments regarding aid to the Palestinian people as it seeks to obtain its fundamental rights, including the inalienable rights to build an independent State on its own territory and to enjoy peace and security, like all other peoples on Earth.

Mr. Huang Xueqi (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): This outgoing year has been marked by a continuous growth in the number and scale of natural disasters and complex emergencies around the globe. Natural disasters have time and again wrought devastation in some of the poorest countries, leaving many people, including refugees and internally displaced persons, struggling in endless misery. New armed conflicts have broken out one after another, adding to the number of long-standing emergencies. The Chinese delegation is deeply concerned over the increase in and exacerbation of these situations. At the same time, however, we have taken note with satisfaction that the Office for the

Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the United Nations Interdepartmental Framework for Coordination Team and the Office of the Regional Coordinator for the United Nations have cooperated well with each other and achieved fruitful results.

The Chinese delegation would like to make the following statements on some of the issues mentioned in the report of the Secretary-General.

First, the Chinese delegation has always maintained that any measure undertaken by the United Nations and the international community, be it in providing humanitarian relief in situations of natural disaster and conflict or in building peace in post-relief situations, must be strictly based on the guiding principles of the United Nations Charter. The principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality must be followed in good faith and the sovereignty, territorial integrity and national unity of countries must be respected. Relevant agencies of the United Nations and regional organizations should play a role only within their capacity and scope of responsibility. Challenging the aforementioned principles will make it difficult to achieve the expected results of humanitarian relief and will likely give rise to new humanitarian disasters.

Secondly, as the Secretary-General indicates in his report, the important role of science and technology in the mitigation and prevention of disasters should be given more attention. At the same time, however, the international community should also realize that, in implementing regional and international cooperation on the early warning and mitigation of disasters, we should give particular priority to helping disaster-afflicted countries to establish their own early warning, preparedness and disaster relief capacities so that they will be more prepared for emergencies and able to rely on their own resources to respond speedily to disasters and reduce losses. In a time beset by disasters, external assistance can play an important complementary role, but a fundamental solution has to be found in the strengthening of the capacity-building of countries concerned, as fully evidenced by experiences in many countries.

Thirdly, with respect to the issue of internally displaced persons, which has attracted wide attention this year, we believe that it is an internal affair within the borders of a country. The Government of the country concerned should bear the main responsibility for protecting and providing relief to its internally displaced persons, while the United Nations and the international community should adopt a cautious and prudent approach to this matter. The formulation and implementation of any relief assistance framework must have a prior request lodged by the country concerned and its full cooperation and participation, so as to achieve the expected results. In the implementation of the framework, international law and the domestic laws of the country concerned should be respected and the relevant provisions of the United Nations Charter and international norms strictly abided by.

The Chinese delegation would like to endorse the recommendation in the Secretary-General's report that Member States commit adequate resources to humanitarian operations through multilateral channels. However, judging from the present situation, this will be no easy task. In order to ensure more expeditious and effective coordination of international responses in providing assistance, we appeal to donor countries able to do so to increase their contributions in this regard.

We also endorse the Secretary-General's proposal for encouraging cooperation between intergovernmental bodies and Member States to strengthen early warning, prevention and preparedness mechanisms for natural disasters and other emergencies. In our view, cooperation between neighbours and within a region is part of the international effort to provide humanitarian relief. There is an ancient saying in China that a good neighbour is more available than a distant relative in times of need. Such cooperation is important, particularly in early warning and emergency relief.

Finally, the Chinese delegation hopes that all sides will be able to draw useful lessons from a review of the work undertaken in the humanitarian field in the past year and to strengthen dialogue, exchange and coordination, so as to play a more important and active role in maintaining world peace and security and promoting common development.

Mr. Sun Joun-yung (Republic of Korea): Allow me to begin by expressing my delegation's appreciation to the Secretary-General for his comprehensive reports on the important agenda item that is now before us. These reports are the fruits of the ongoing efforts by the United Nations to provide better-coordinated responses to natural disasters and complex emergencies. We welcome and fully support this

campaign. In particular, my delegation appreciates the activities initiated by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

Over the past year, the world has witnessed the terrifying results of increases in the number and the scale of natural disasters in many parts of the world: two earthquakes in Turkey, the worst flood in the history of Venezuela, a severe drought in the Horn of Africa, devastating flooding in Madagascar and Mozambique and a cyclone in Orissa, India. The United Nations system has made considerable progress towards developing a more holistic and strategic approach to responding to natural disasters. We feel it imperative that Member countries use the heightened national and international awareness of humanitarian principles to garner sufficient political will to sustain the progress that has been made thus far. For their part, my Government and Korean civil society provided humanitarian assistance amounting to $2.3 million and dispatched 53 rescue personnel to countries devastated by natural disasters and complex emergencies between August 1999 and August 2000.

Natural disasters are not the only perils that have become increasingly common over the past several years. As we embark on the new millennium, refugee crises and humanitarian emergencies have been erupting at a relentless pace. Internal and intraregional conflicts in many parts of the world are threatening civilian populations as never before, forcing more than 35 million civilians to become refugees and internally displaced persons. Particularly tragic is the targeting in armed conflicts of the most vulnerable members of our society: children, women and underprivileged persons. The international community, Governments and relevant parties in complex emergency situations must ensure the safe return of refugees and internally displaced persons in accordance with international norms.

Technology can play an important role in reducing the suffering and damage caused by natural disasters and complex emergencies. This year the issue has already been discussed in many international forums, including the substantive session of the Economic and Social Council, the Group of Eight meeting at Okinawa, Japan and the Millennium Summit. Considering the immense potential of technology in the field of natural disasters and complex emergencies, my delegation suggests that all countries make a strong effort to help each other in areas where technology can be used effectively. Moreover, we urge host Governments to help humanitarian personnel use their communications equipment and to exchange information data without bureaucratic restrictions.

Along with technology, better coordination in all phases, from prevention to early warning, of disaster preparedness and mitigation is one of the keys to improving humanitarian and disaster relief assistance. For too long, we have divided relief efforts into time-frames, long-term and short-term, as well as by function, institution, logistics and even financing. Our recent experiences in the field, however, have proved that relief efforts cannot be neatly separated into tidy packages. Knowing that phases and functions often overlap, we must now embrace an approach that is both integrated and comprehensive in order to effectively deal with the realities on the ground. Thus, short-term relief assistance and long-term development aid should be combined at the initial stages of humanitarian assistance efforts.

Let me now turn to the issue of the safety and security of aid workers. To allow aid workers to carry out their urgent tasks efficiently, effectively and, above all, safely is the most important problem for the international community to solve. Aid workers have increasingly found themselves the focus of attacks as they try courageously to alleviate suffering in conflicts that rage out of control. Since January 1992, 198 United Nations civilian staff members have been killed, and since November 1994, 240 staff members have been kidnapped or held hostage. As recently as 6 September of this year, three Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees aid workers in West Timor were killed, while world leaders were assembled at the Millennium Summit. These numbers remind us that this trend shows no sign of abating in the near future. Even more discouraging is the fact that, among 177 cases of killings and attacks, only three cases have been legally investigated.

As we enter a new millennium, we believe that the international community should no longer tolerate these deplorable developments and should take immediate and resolute steps to prevent such humanitarian tragedies, particularly to thwart violations of international humanitarian principles. In this regard, my delegation urges relevant Governments to take appropriate measures, including initiating legal investigations and combating impunity. Furthermore, this Assembly should carry out substantial discussions

on the effective protection of humanitarian assistance, including the establishment of a mechanism to find ways to extend the scope of legal protection under the 1994 Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel. In this regard, in response to paragraph 17 of General Assembly resolution 54/192, we take note of the fact that a separate report was issued this morning by the Secretary-General with the aim of addressing issues relating to the scope of the legal protection afforded by the 1994 Convention. We expect that this report and the suggestions therein will be considered in depth at the fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly.

Finally, I would like to state that my delegation is supportive of the idea that the Office of the United Nations Security Coordinator should be strengthened both financially and structurally. We hope that the Member States will discuss in depth the proposals for strengthening the safety and security system for United Nations personnel, contained in the report in document A/55/494, during this session of the General Assembly, in particular through the Fifth Committee.

In conclusion, I would like to assure Members that my Government remains steadfast in its support for and commitment to the humanitarian assistance and protection efforts of the United Nations, and we pledge to continue contributing to this collective endeavour.

Mr. Donigi (Papua New Guinea): I have the honour to make this statement on behalf of the following Pacific Forum countries represented here at the United Nations: Australia, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Fiji Islands, the Marshall Islands, Nauru, New Zealand, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Vanuatu and my own country, Papua New Guinea.

We welcome the comprehensive reports of the Secretary-General on this important agenda item, especially the reports concerning responses to natural disasters. It is in this context that we welcome the draft resolution contained in document A/55/L.38, which the United Nations is about to adopt, on international cooperation on humanitarian assistance in the field of natural disasters, from relief to development. We thank all those delegations that have been active in the development of this draft resolution, and especially the delegation of India. The Member States of the Pacific Forum fully endorse this draft resolution.

The subregion of the Pacific is extremely vulnerable to natural disasters, which include violent tropical cyclones, El Niño, tsunamis, tidal waves, drought and bush fires to earthquakes. We have therefore always been thankful for the much-needed assistance our peoples have received from many sources, including international relief agencies, both governmental and non-governmental. Those of our countries that are within the so-called Pacific Ring of Fire are especially subjected to large earthquakes on a perennial basis. My own country witnessed such an earthquake only two weeks ago; it measured over 7 on the Richter scale. It destroyed 70 homes and a number of business structures. When an earthquake is centred deep at the bottom of the ocean, it results in tsunamis. The combination of tidal wave movements and the physical shaking and undulations of the earth's surface can result in unpredictable consequences to human lives and property. Papua New Guinea suffered only one death from the earthquake and a small tsunami that followed.

It is therefore especially important that the scientific knowledge that has been gained over time and the new technologies for predicting and measuring the causes and effects of natural disasters be made available to all peoples of the world. Technologies for determining the appropriate building structures for earthquake- and tsunami-prone areas must be made known to the people susceptible to these phenomena. Information dissemination is therefore very important.

We acknowledge that following the earthquake in Papua New Guinea two weeks ago, the early warning systems appear to have been immediately put into place, with a "tsunami watch" posted to a number of other Pacific countries. This is a welcome development. We thank all United Nations, governmental and non-governmental agencies involved in coordination and delivery of this early warning advice.

The economies of many small island nations are extremely vulnerable to these natural disasters. It was in this light that the South Pacific Applied Geoscience Commission (SOPAC) began work on the development of an environmental vulnerability index. Last week, the SOPAC technical analyst was in the Caribbean country of Saint Lucia, collecting data for input into the economic models being developed. We are hoping for further collaboration from other island nations such as Maldives and Singapore. SOPAC hopes to submit its work to the Economic and Social Council's Committee for Development Policy by March next year. We are

grateful to those Governments that have contributed financially to the studies being undertaken by SOPAC.

We note in particular that paragraph 12 of the draft resolution stresses the need for specialized companies to promote the use of technologies to strengthen preparedness and response to natural disasters. In the field of natural disasters, we cannot exclude the involvement of the private sector. The only qualifier should be that technologies developed must be made available at minimal costs to those affected by natural disasters. We therefore call on all States to cooperate in the development and the transfer to affected countries of appropriate technologies in this field. Like last year, we again welcome the space-based technologies for the prevention, mitigation and management of natural disasters in vulnerable societies. In this respect, we again repeat our collective appreciation to those countries, international organizations and non-governmental organizations that have continually provided assistance to the Pacific Island nations, especially Australia, the European Union, Japan, New Zealand, the United States, and the United Nations Development Programme as the implementing agency for the Pacific region.

Last year we agreed that the Central Emergency Revolving Fund and other appropriate contingency funds should be enhanced and more actively used for timely response. This year, we support a request to the Secretary-General, as contained in resolution 54/95 and resolution 54/233, to submit to the General Assembly concrete proposals in order to enhance the functioning and utilization of the Central Emergency Revolving Fund. In this regard, we support a request to the Secretary-General to consider a more active use of this fund for timely and adequate natural disaster response. Innovative mechanisms to improve international response to natural disasters and other emergencies should also be considered.

Mr. Cappagli (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, the delegation of Argentina wishes to thank the Secretary-General for his reports on strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations (A/55/82), safety and security of United Nations personnel (A/55/494) and the scope of legal protection under the Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel (A/55/637).

The magnitude of natural disasters, as well as of various internal or international conflicts, continues to subject entire populations to harsh humanitarian emergency conditions. In confronting these situations, the United Nations continues to redouble its efforts to bring its support to those needy populations. The Republic of Argentina wishes to express its appreciation for the work of the Office of Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and the various agencies and bodies of the system with competence in the field under the guidance of the principles established in resolution 46/182.

It is my delegation's understanding that the implementation of those actions requires coordinated action on the part of the General Assembly, the Economic and Social Council and the Security Council in order to address, within their respective areas of competence, the various humanitarian aspects. In that context, we regret that the Economic and Social Council humanitarian segment was not able this year to reach agreed conclusions by consensus.

In the face of the major challenges posed by current humanitarian emergencies, it is our understanding that it is up to the Member States to adopt measures to provide political and logistic support so as to better meet the needs for assistance. Within the range of measures that States should adopt in this field, my delegation wishes to make specific reference to the situation of humanitarian personnel. The conflicts and complex emergency situations of the past decade reveal that there are now means of waging war that routinely involve attacks on civilian populations, cutting off supplies of food and medicines to these populations and deliberate attacks on humanitarian personnel.

The Republic of Argentina forcefully condemns killings, actions against physical integrity, rape and other sexual attacks, robberies and all manner of acts of physical and psychological violence to which humanitarian personnel are subjected in the selfless fulfilment of their tasks. At the same time, we would like once again to convey our condolences to the families and friends of the victims who, unfortunately, have joined the long list of those whose concern for their fellow human beings has been taken to the extreme of giving their own lives in the service of others. As the Minister for Foreign Affairs of my country indicated in February of this year, during the Security Council debate on the safety and security of

United Nations personnel, associated personnel and humanitarian personnel:

> "Those who work tirelessly, giving all their effort, their solidarity or their lives to alleviate the suffering of their fellow human beings, deserve our deepest appreciation, our gratitude and our commitment to do our utmost to defend them. These individuals set an example for all of us." *(S/PV.4100, p. 23)*

In calling for a debate on this item during its Security Council presidency, the Republic of Argentina wanted to sound an alarm regarding the grave dangers confronting these personnel, to draw attention to the need to adopt the necessary measures to protect them, to pay them a well-deserved tribute and to express some of the gratitude that the United Nations and the Member States owe them.

It is my country's understanding that the responsibility for the security and protection of humanitarian personnel — including the creation of an appropriate environment in which they can do their work — rests with the Government that receives the humanitarian mission. At the same time, we consider it essential that humanitarian personnel be provided safe and unrestricted access to the affected zones so that they can perform their task of assisting civilian populations in need, including refugees and internally displaced persons. We urge all States to ensure that any act or threat of violence against humanitarian personnel committed on their territory is appropriately investigated and that appropriate measures are taken to prosecute and punish the aggressors.

Likewise, we urge that the status of humanitarian personnel and their rights in case of detention be strictly respected. This should include the provision of medical assistance when necessary.

The Republic of Argentina agrees that there is an immediate need to implement the measures regarding the appointment and training of personnel that were suggested by the Secretary-General in his report on the security of United Nations personnel. We also support the temporary budgetary measures suggested in that document that are aimed at responding to the most urgent needs in order to strengthen the security of United Nations personnel during the biennium 2000-2001. At the same time, we pledge to give due consideration to any proposals that the Secretary-General may put forward to establish a stable financial structure for the security of United Nations personnel as of the biennium 2002-2003.

Furthermore, my country believes it is crucial to strengthen the legal system of protection for humanitarian personnel. To that end, we urge States that have not yet done so to ratify the 1994 Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel, as well as the Rome Statute establishing the International Criminal Court. We consider it noteworthy progress that attacks against humanitarian personnel have been made part of the jurisdiction of that high tribunal. Argentina has ratified the first of the aforementioned legal instruments and will soon move to ratify the second.

Lastly, we attach great importance to the report submitted by the Secretary-General on the scope of legal protection provided under the Convention on the Safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel. We are prepared to give the subject the careful consideration it deserves, so that different categories of humanitarian personnel will receive proper legal protection.

Mr. Bakoniarivo (Madagascar) (*spoke in French*): In resolution 54/96 M, adopted on 14 March last, the General Assembly expressed its grave concern about the extensive damage and devastation caused by the tropical cyclones Eline and Gloria and the floods that struck Madagascar. It requested States and international organizations to provide additional emergency support to Madagascar with a view to alleviating the economic and financial burden borne by the people of Madagascar during the emergency period and in the subsequent process of rehabilitation.

The members of the international community, through bilateral and multilateral bodies, responded favourably to that appeal, making significant contributions to relief and reconstruction activities in the affected areas. The mobilization of international aid made possible the rapid delivery and secure distribution of food and non-food emergency assistance, as well as the partial rehabilitation of damaged infrastructure.

I should like to stress that during the 2000 cyclone season, three cyclones struck Madagascar within a period of six weeks. In addition to the cyclones Eline and Gloria, which struck on 17 February and 2 March 2000 respectively, and which led to the adoption of resolution 54/96 M, a third cyclone,

Hudah, which was more powerful than the two that preceded it, hit Madagascar on 2 April 2000, destroying 80 per cent of one area of export crops on which the economy of Madagascar largely depends. These three cyclones left 291 people dead and seriously affected 1,106,208 people in 70 villages.

Despite the precariousness and vulnerability of its economic situation, the Government of Madagascar has made the necessary efforts to provide relief for the suffering of the victims of these cyclones and carry out urgent reconstruction work. However, in the light of the very high cost of rehabilitation, estimated at $108 million, these efforts will be insufficient without the assistance of the international community, which is invaluable in overcoming the serious humanitarian and material consequences of natural disasters.

I should therefore like to express once again the heartfelt thanks and profound appreciation of the Government of Madagascar to all States, organs and bodies of the United Nations and international financial institutions, as well as the non-governmental organizations that have provided assistance in support of the rescue, recovery and reconstruction operations and programmes undertaken by the Government of Madagascar.

In this context, we would also like to pay a well-deserved tribute to the diligent and effective actions of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, at New York and Geneva Headquarters and in the field, as well as the greatly appreciated action of the Resident Coordinator in mobilizing international assistance. We should also like to reiterate our gratitude to the Secretary-General, who made the international community aware of these disasters from the very beginning. We also take this opportunity to express to him our gratitude for his report in document A/55/124 on assistance to Madagascar following the tropical cyclones.

We are convinced that international solidarity remains the most effective weapon for coping with the unpredictable nature of natural disasters, as the expertise and technology to master them has not yet been developed. This conviction, and the objectives that Madagascar shares with the other Members of our Organization, give us confidence that Madagascar will continue to benefit from the spirit of international solidarity in carrying out its onerous task of recovery, as was so well emphasized by the Secretary-General in his report, as well as in the quest for sustainable development for the well-being of the people of Madagascar.

The meeting was suspended at 4.30 p.m. and resumed at 4.35 p.m.

Mr. Jilani (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): I wish at the outset, on behalf of my delegation, to express my sincere thanks and high appreciation to the Secretary-General, His Excellency Mr. Kofi Annan, for his report contained in document A/55/137. My profound thanks go also to Mr. Terje Roed Larsen, the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Palestinian Authority.

For more than two months now, the Palestinian territories, including Jerusalem, have been the site of ongoing aggression by Israel, the occupying Power, against the Palestinian people. Among the victims have been more than 230 Palestinian martyrs and more than 10,000 injured, most of them permanently maimed, which will prevent them forever from resuming a normal life. More than a third of the victims have been children under the age of 18. In addition to all the deaths and injuries, many public and private buildings have been bombed and destroyed by the Israeli forces of occupation; those forces have uprooted fruit trees, have deliberately attacked the infrastructure and have destroyed roads linking Palestinian towns and villages. They have destroyed electric power plants and radio and television stations.

Likewise, the forces of occupation have imposed a total internal blockade on the movement of people and goods between Palestinian towns and villages and the outside world. This has paralysed the Palestinian economy and has led to severe shortages of goods and fuel; reports indicate that in the Gaza area famine is imminent. The strict blockade has given rise to the destruction of the Palestinian economy and to a drop in production, causing a decline to less than 20 per cent of earlier economic activity. Unemployment in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip stands at more than 45 per cent, and more than 1.3 million Palestinians are living below the poverty line, on less than a dollar and a half a day. Similarly, the total material losses are greater than $900 million, far exceeding donor-country subsidies to the Palestinian people. That is not to

mention a complete halt to development projects and infrastructure development programmes.

The Special Coordinator has reported that material losses to the Palestinians are a result of Israel's use of heavy weapons, including rockets, against many buildings, vehicles and fruit orchards. His report indicates also that Israeli settlers have joined in the destruction of private property, such as Gaza-based trucks privately owned by Palestinians, which transport goods to and from Gaza and which were waiting at Israeli checkpoints. It also speaks of vast losses in the public sector in the health and social welfare sphere; the Palestinian Ministry of Health and Social Welfare now has a great burden to bear.

Here we would like to express our gratitude to our brothers from the Arab States who have received a number of seriously injured individuals and provided medication and medical assistance on an emergency basis. We would also like to thank and express our appreciation to the donor countries and to the non-governmental organizations that have provided humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian people. We also reaffirm the urgent need for donor countries and the United Nations and its agencies to provide emergency assistance to the Palestinian people besieged by the Israeli occupation forces.

It is clear that the reasons for this crisis are the continuation of the illegal Israeli occupation of Palestinian land, including East Jerusalem, the continuation of the policy of expanding settlements, the non-implementation of agreements, the profanation of holy Christian and Muslim sites and the non-implementation of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

For this reason, the establishment of just and comprehensive peace and of security and stability in the whole region requires an end to the Israeli occupation, a withdrawal from all the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, as well as from the occupied Syrian Golan, recognition of the rights of the Palestinian people to self-determination and to the establishment of their own independent State, and total sovereignty over their territory. Without achieving this, there will never be progress in the peace process and we will never be able to speak of regional development or of regional cooperation with Israel, the occupying Power.

In conclusion, we wish to reaffirm the important role of the United Nations in the implementation of a just and comprehensive peace based on the permanent responsibility of the United Nations regarding the question of Palestine, the importance of its assistance to the Palestinian people and the importance of the role played by the Special Coordinator and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority.

The President: In accordance with General Assembly resolution 49/2 of 19 October 1994, I now give the floor to Ms. Astrid Heiberg, President of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies.

Ms. Heiberg (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies): The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies is pleased to have this opportunity to address the General Assembly on matters that are of deep concern to us, as they are to the entire humanitarian community.

Improving the ways we work together is central to the interests of the victims and the vulnerable whom we serve, vital to retaining the respect and loyalty of our volunteers and crucial in building the confidence of Governments in our ability to do the work we are there to do.

The issue of the coordination of humanitarian assistance has been debated in the General Assembly every year since the early 90s. This reflects the inherent difficulties in achieving the appropriate level of coordination. It may also reflect that talking in general terms about the need for coordination does not bring us forward. We need to be specific about what kind of coordination we want, and what we do not want. Unless carefully designed, coordination in the form of centralizing bodies can actually be counterproductive to locally based action and responsibility, upon which our Red Cross and Red Crescent network is based. Coordination done wrongly can create new layers of bureaucracy where there is a need to reduce existing bureaucracies. This being said, all players in the humanitarian, political and development spheres must manage crisis in a comprehensive manner, taking due account of the respective responsibilities, mandates and spheres of competence of each party.

An important tool for better coordinated management of humanitarian crises is the Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red

Crescent Movement and Non-Governmental Organizations in Disaster Relief. This work is taken further in the Sphere Project, with the humanitarian charter and minimum standards in disaster response. It sets out standards for humanitarian assistance against which humanitarian organizations can be held accountable. Governments should also take responsibility for implementing such standards, possibly through codes of conduct of their own. Compliance with the Code of Conduct could also be secured if donors use these as a criterion for funding. This would also lead to better coordination.

Last year the call for improved coordination and better-quality assistance came through strongly at the twenty-seventh International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, of which States parties to the Geneva Conventions are part. The plan of action adopted at that Conference included a commitment from the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement to improve our coordination and cooperation in our international activities, both internally and with States, the United Nations system and other actors, based upon the Code of Conduct; and support from both States and the Movement for efforts to develop minimum practical standards for the delivery of humanitarian assistance, such as those elaborated in the Sphere Project.

While much has been done to achieve better quality and coordination, we are facing major challenges, one of which is the lack of a systematic legal framework for disaster response, which may cause unnecessary difficulties in responding to disasters. Some elements of such a framework already exist, including United Nations resolutions, conventions, such as for the use of radio communication, as well as customary law. This constitutes the beginnings of what I like to refer to as an international disaster response law.

The need for such a legal framework was discussed in our *World Disasters Report* this year, including some basic concepts and possibilities to cover those gaps by developing so-called international disaster response law. Based on the Federation and our National Societies' experiences in the field, we have initiated consultations on these issues with other interested parties. This work cannot be done by us alone. We therefore invite the United Nations and its individual Member States, as well as relevant non-governmental organizations, to participate actively in this work.

The humanitarian community is rightly concerned with the plight of the internally displaced, including not only those displaced by armed conflict, but also those displaced by natural and man-made disasters, the side effects of development projects and those forced to move into already overcrowded cities because of fear that they are unable to provide for themselves.

Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies are well placed to assist in these activities. If appropriately supported we can provide preparedness and early warning in the first phase, because we are part of the community and have a network of branches throughout the country; can provide response in the first emergency phase, particularly where access is a problem for the international community; can supplement actions and mandates of other organizations in the care and maintenance phase and in the solution phase; and, not least, National Societies, as local organizations, can enable integration to work in the final integration phase. Nevertheless, it must not be forgotten that States have the primary responsibility for the protection of all people within their borders. Organizations like the Red Cross and Red Crescent are there to assist States in discharging that responsibility.

The General Assembly has before it the report of the Secretary-General on the subject of security for humanitarian workers. We highly appreciate the work of the United Nations in this regard, not least because we, too, face the problem of maintaining a presence in situations of instability and violence. We are nevertheless worried by the almost exclusive focus on the situation of international staff of international organizations. We do understand the reasons for that: organizations have concerns for their staff, Governments for their citizens and media for their home audiences. But that is no excuse for ignoring the situation of locally recruited staff, volunteers and staff of our counterpart organizations at the national level. These humanitarian workers — who are there before, during and after a crisis — suffer many more casualties than do international staff, and with more severe consequences for their families and dependants. Moreover, they often face danger as a direct consequence of our international actions, policies and statements — matters on which they have little influence. On behalf of, especially, the volunteers who will be the subject of United Nations celebrations over the next year, I call upon both States and agencies to pay full attention to those humanitarian workers who

put their security at stake to enable international agencies to carry out our tasks.

Ensuring effective and efficient coordination is our collective duty, and if it fails, we have failed. We need to continue to build the institutional framework within which coordination can take place and to develop the needed legal instruments. But our focus must be on the people we serve — the internally displaced, the victims of natural disasters and the individuals and families fleeing war and strife. They must get the assistance, support and protection they need.

In that context, and with the permission of the President, let me take this opportunity to advertise one of tomorrow's events, namely, the occasion on which we inaugurate the International Year of Volunteers. Let us recall that while we agencies, States and international organizations see ourselves as significant players, the first and most important emergency response — the immediate, life-saving action — is provided by family, relatives, friends and neighbours: in short, by volunteers.

Let me end by restating the commitment of the International Federation to constructive participation in the coordination of humanitarian assistance. I assure the General Assembly of our willingness to engage and cooperate.

The President: In accordance with General Assembly resolution 45/6, of 16 October 1990, I now call on the observer for the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Mr. Paclisanu (International Committee of the Red Cross): The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) welcomes this renewed opportunity to share its views in the General Assembly on the subject of humanitarian coordination.

In essence, the situation of victims of conflict has hardly changed for the better. In many instances it has deteriorated further in the past year. As a humanitarian organization active principally in situations of armed conflict and internal violence, the ICRC is appalled by the continuing suffering inflicted on civilians, including women and children, in flagrant violation of the most basic principles of international humanitarian law. In too many ongoing conflicts civilians are increasingly being targeted, killed, wounded, uprooted and separated from their families. They are denied basic resources and are seeing their survival and dignity threatened.

That, in turn, entails several humanitarian consequences of major proportions. It triggers the displacement of large numbers of persons within and across boundaries. Children find themselves forcibly conscripted, their lives often destroyed. Women bear the brunt of sexual assault and the tragedy of widowhood. To make matters worse, the proliferation of persons carrying arms has aggravated violence and insecurity. Humanitarian action has itself become a dangerous business to carry out in many contexts.

As a direct consequence of this, humanitarian needs in terms of both assistance and protection have not only increased in a spectacular fashion, but they have also become more and more difficult to adequately address. That leaves far too many people to their fate, unassisted and unprotected. In parallel, the overall humanitarian response has itself become highly complex due, among other reasons, to the large number of actors, imprecise mandates and difficulties in achieving effective coordination. Such obstacles are at times compounded by a lack of commonly agreed principles of action.

The International Committee therefore strongly believes that the strengthening of humanitarian coordination is of paramount importance, both in order to better respond to the needs of victims and to render the deployment of humanitarian action safer. To that end, it is crucial to ensure that the nature, principles and goals of strictly humanitarian action are well understood, and therefore accepted by all parties involved. In that context, the ICRC can never tire of repeating that political action has to be kept distinct from humanitarian operations. In its view, an emergency situation warrants two types of responses. One is the search for a stable political settlement; the other, distinct response is the alleviation of the humanitarian consequences of conflicts.

Of course, such a statement does not amount to a denial of the evident interrelations that exist between humanitarian crises and the political, military and economic factors involved in them. Rather, it is a recognition of the fact that, however well intended, a confusion of these two responses is likely to produce de facto biases in the provision of assistance and protection. This may compromise the neutrality of a strictly humanitarian endeavour in the eyes of warring

parties, and as a consequence jeopardize its very security. Ultimately, this may well increase the number of civilians beyond the reach of the aid community.

Bearing those considerations in mind, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement has undertaken steps — in particular through the Sevilla Agreement — in order to harmonize coordination within the Movement itself, and between the respective mandates of its components, namely, the National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, their International Federation and the ICRC. In conflict situations it is incumbent upon the International Committee of the Red Cross to coordinate the efforts of the Movement. Such coordination could simply not have been possible without the invaluable support of National Societies, which play a vital role in the strengthening of local coping mechanisms.

Furthermore, in a number of contexts, the ICRC relies heavily, sometimes exclusively, on the personnel of the National Societies, working in very difficult and precarious situations. It therefore wishes to express its profound gratitude and sincere admiration to them.

Finally, within the framework of its field activities, the ICRC increasingly involves National Societies of third countries which show an interest in its operations.

The ICRC reiterates its full commitment to achieving the greatest possible complementarity with other humanitarian actors. In this spirit, and in its capacity as a standing invitee, it substantially contributes in the various meetings of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) and its subsidiary bodies, be they on thematic or operational issues. In the field, it cooperates with the United Nations-led inter-agency coordination efforts and supports ad hoc arrangements designed to take into account rapidly changing circumstances. One very recent example of this approach is its interaction, within the limits of its mandate, with the senior inter-agency network on internal displacement, both at Headquarters and in the field. Another example is the ICRC's contribution to the IASC Sub-Working Group on Gender and Humanitarian Response on the theme of women and war. A third, in relation to children in armed conflict, is the joint United Nations Children's Fund/ICRC 1999 publication of an educational module regarding the use of child soldiers and the implementation of international law.

In parallel, the ICRC pursues a sustained bilateral dialogue with a range of United Nations agencies and bodies, such as the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, as well as with concerned non-governmental organizations, the fundamental objective of which is to determine the modalities of improved humanitarian cooperation in the field. In this context, the International Committee also wishes to mention its regular relations with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. The rationale behind such exchanges stems from the complementarity of our organizations, which, acting on the basis of our respective mandates and working methods, strive to safeguard human dignity.

Another area in which the ICRC's approach has evolved is in the enhancement of complementarity and coordination in the transition from emergency relief to rehabilitation and, ultimately, development. The focus of its emergency relief operations is increasingly oriented towards rehabilitation, taking into account the capacities and roles of the civilians themselves, of the National Societies, of the authorities of the countries concerned and of organizations such as the World Bank.

In conclusion, the ICRC wishes to emphasize that appropriate and enhanced coordination is more necessary than ever. At the same time, it is also firmly determined to effectively fulfil its special role as an independent and neutral intermediary in situations of armed conflict, as enshrined in the Geneva Conventions, and to gain access to all victims, wherever they may be.

The President: In accordance with the decision taken at the 71st plenary meeting, this morning, I now call on the observer of Switzerland.

Mr. Helg (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): First of all, I would like sincerely to thank the acting Emergency Relief Coordinator and all the personnel of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) for the excellent work done last year.

In the year 2000, OCHA and the international humanitarian community have once again dealt with a considerable number of challenges in carrying out their shared responsibility in rendering humanitarian assistance.

Allow me to dwell more specifically on some of these challenges. It is the duty of the international

community to protect and to come to the assistance of those in need, be they the victims of armed conflict or of natural disasters. It is in the name of that collective responsibility that there is a need once again to reaffirm the major principles governing international humanitarian action — independence, neutrality and impartiality — as well as the duty to ensure unrestricted access to aid for victims and to guarantee the security of the humanitarian actors. Non-respect for these principles that have been endorsed by the international community cannot be tolerated when what is at stake is the life of individuals and of groups of peoples, such as internally displaced persons or those living in refugee camps. The protection of these categories of individuals is essential, since they are the most vulnerable to acts of aggression carried out by armed elements.

It is important that the States of both the North and the South speak as one to defend these principles, for without respect for them no humanitarian action is possible. Moreover, the physical elimination of men and women dedicated to the humanitarian cause underscores in particularly brutal fashion the issue of security, be it that of civilian populations or that of humanitarian players. The State on whose territory such acts are committed bears the primary responsibility, in particular when it allows the action of armed bands against defenceless individuals.

However, the international community, and the United Nations in particular, are also responsible for the humanitarian personnel in their employ. It is urgent that the United Nations be given additional means to ensure the security of the humanitarian actors, as well as that of the victims of conflict. Switzerland would like to voice to the Secretary-General its full support for the measures he has proposed in this context.

The last meeting of the Economic and Social Council showed that real difficulties exist in the area of humanitarian action. These difficulties relate both to politics and specifically to humanitarian action. Switzerland has been following these difficulties with ever-growing concern, and they prompt us to raise questions of principle — questions calling for answers that by definition are difficult — and to reflect on the concept of the humanitarian segment. We continue to believe that this segment remains an important forum for humanitarian dialogue and must therefore be strengthened.

But it seems to us that the usefulness of agreed conclusions must be carefully reconsidered in the future. In other words, greater attention should be paid to the question of the relationship between efforts and results. The implementation of the Brahimi report is another aspect of the present political discussion with which the humanitarian community must seriously deal. It is quite natural that this report focuses on future concepts of peacekeeping operations. However, it should not be forgotten that such operations are set up on territory already occupied by development or humanitarian agencies. Therefore, there is a need to consider in a new light, and to analyse, dissonance between political, military and humanitarian questions.

Sensitive situations may arise in the relationship between peacekeeping operations and humanitarian operations. What happens to humanitarian actors when a peacekeeping operation withdraws for whatever reason — for instance, because of inadequate security? How should cooperation between humanitarian activities and peacekeeping be formulated?

Switzerland is gratified to note that the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance has announced that it intends to devote particular attention to questions of this kind in the upcoming discussions on the implementation of the Brahimi report. Switzerland supports this new approach, which falls directly within the main purview of OCHA.

In conclusion, I should like to touch on the internal organization of OCHA. Switzerland has been following with interest the administrative reform under way. As we see it, this process, though useful, should not fail to take into account the need for stability, because this kind of refocusing usually creates considerable insecurity among staff.

We have noted with satisfaction the efforts currently under way to define a doctrine that is applicable in New York, Geneva and in the field, as well as in the area of natural disasters and complex emergency situations. We cannot but support such an initiative and are convinced that OCHA's achievements will largely depend on it.

Finally, Switzerland takes note of the progress made by the United Nations towards establishing a system of coordination of humanitarian activities which meets the criteria of efficiency and consistency. It encourages OCHA and the humanitarian agencies to

pursue such work and urges States to become actively involved in this process.

The President: We have heard the last speaker in the debate on this item.

The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/55/L.16, entitled "International cooperation and coordination for the human and ecological rehabilitation and economic development of the Semipalatinsk region of Kazakhstan".

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt the draft resolution?

Draft resolution A/55/L.16 was adopted (resolution 55/44).

The President: The Assembly will now take a decision on draft resolution A/55/L.41, entitled "Emergency international assistance for peace, normalcy and rehabilitation of Tajikistan".

I should like to announce that, since the publication of the draft resolution, the following countries have become sponsors of draft resolution A/55/L.41: Croatia, Morocco and Slovenia.

May I take it that the Assembly decides to adopt draft resolution A/55/L.41?

Draft resolution A/55/L.41 was adopted (resolution 55/45).

The President: I should like to inform members that action on draft resolutions A/55/L.35, A/55/L.36 and A/55/L.38 will be taken at a later date, and that further draft resolutions on this item will be submitted also at a later date.

I shall now call on those representatives who wish to speak in exercise of the right of reply.

Mr. Shacham (Israel): It is indeed a shame that in this debate, on a subject which enjoys universal support — assistance to the Palestinian people — a worthy issue is being abused as a platform for unfounded accusations against my country.

It is most unfortunate that the Palestinian Observer has chosen to politicize this issue and thereby distract the attention and energy of the Assembly from achieving the common goal of improving the well-being of the Palestinian population.

Israel deeply regrets the suffering that has come to Palestinian society as a whole as a result of the deliberate decision of the Palestinian leadership to pursue violence rather than negotiation. We have repeatedly made clear that our objective is a negotiated peace settlement that will bring calm and security to all the peoples of the region. Israel was pursuing such a settlement in good faith and had made unprecedented and far-reaching compromise proposals at the July Camp David summit. Yet the response of the Palestinian leadership was a rejection of compromise and a concerted decision to return to the violence and terrorism which was to have been renounced in 1993, as the basic, fundamental prerequisite of the Israel-Palestine peace process.

The peace process has already brought tangible economic and social benefits to the territories under the administration of the Palestinian Authority. This has been especially true during periods of relative calm. In 1998, the gross national product for these areas grew by an impressive 8 per cent. In 1999, Palestinian unemployment decreased by 13 per cent, much of that due to improved Israeli-Palestinian neighbourly relations, which permitted to daily entry of over 100,000 Palestinians into Israel, where they were employed in a variety of sectors.

I will spare the Assembly a long list of statistics which confirm the positive economic developments that have occurred as a result of peace and cooperation. But suffice it to mention that a number of United Nations reports, including the latest report of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and that of the United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories, point to the tangible rewards that the peace process has brought to the Palestinian people.

I wish to stress that these positive developments were a direct result of the peace process and the period of relative calm that preceded the recent Palestinian violence. In choosing to return to violence and terrorism, the Palestinians are undoing many of the gains that have been achieved. By seeking to achieve their political goals through force rather than by negotiation, the Palestinians are bringing economic calamity upon themselves, by their own hand.

Throughout the disturbances, Israel has been making every effort to minimize the hardship to the Palestinian population. Israeli forces are acting on clear orders not to harm utilities in order to ensure normal uses of water, electricity and other services. Clearly, in

a time of violence, some local incidents may occur, but we are committed to dealing with them immediately.

I would like to take this opportunity to stress that despite the recent eruption of Palestinian violence, Israel has continued to maintain the free flow of humanitarian assistance and food to the areas under Palestinian Authority administration. In this regard, Israel has expedited the transfer of over 100 shipments of humanitarian aid — in excess of 2,000 tons — to the Palestinian Authority since the outbreak of the violence.

This assistance, which has more than quadrupled in volume since last year, passes through Israeli ports of entry exempt of customs and import taxes. Due to this unprecedented volume, Israel has established a special task force which works seven days a week, 24 hours a day, to accelerate the transfer of assistance to the Palestinians, despite the fact that Israeli port officials have been targeted and even killed in the violence and now must work under armed protection. The processing time — usually about two months — has been reduced to less than a week and even shipments from hostile countries, such as Syria, Libya and Iraq, have been facilitated through special approval.

Any movement of goods and persons through Israeli and Israeli-administered areas is restricted only to the extent that such movement impacts directly upon security. The movement of fuel serves as a good example. Israeli tanker trucks can no longer travel safely in the West Bank and Gaza in order to make deliveries. In Gaza, sufficient fuel pipelines exist to take up the slack; however, in the West Bank, deliveries must be transferred to Palestinian trucks at the crossing points. It is a shortage of such Palestinian vehicles and the real threat to the lives of Israeli drivers — rather than an Israeli policy of embargo, as alleged by the Palestinian observer — which have been affecting fuel supplies.

Israel looks forward to the restoration of the conditions which would again make this freedom of movement possible without risking the lives of its citizens to Palestinian sniper fire on the roads or Palestinian terrorist bombings in public places. It should be stressed that the current violence comes on the heels of the Camp David summit, at which the Government of Israel displayed an unprecedented willingness to compromise for the sake of peace. Had an agreement been concluded at that time, not only would the present situation have been avoided, but the Palestinian people would have reaped even greater economic rewards than those of the past several years.

It is unacceptable that, after refusing to even consider Israel's peace overtures, the Palestinians now seek to blame Israel for their current predicament. It is our sincerest hope that there will be a return to calm and stability in the region that will permit us to return to the path of cooperation with our Palestinian neighbours.

Mr. Jilani (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): I did not wish to become involved in this discussion, but I am compelled to address the unfounded allegations and lies of the Israeli representative. I had no desire to answer his lengthy statement of a few moments ago.

To speak of the politicization of this issue is too absurd. How can we speak of assistance to the Palestinian people and urge the donor countries to meet their commitments at a time when the Palestinian economy and the entire infrastructure are being wilfully destroyed by heavy weapons? The report of the United Nations Special Coordinator in the Occupied Territories emphasizes that the destruction of our infrastructure — including our agriculture and our public and private buildings — and the embargo are preventing the Palestinians and their products from moving not only between the occupied territories and Israel and the outer world, but even between villages. In order to ensure that our villages and towns remain isolated from one another, Israel has physically destroyed our roads with explosives.

With respect to the comprehensive blockade of the Palestinian territories, I would like once again to refer to the reports of the Special Coordinator and others, including non-governmental humanitarian organizations. One result of the encirclement is that our wounded cannot be moved from one region to another, leading to several deaths.

Over the course of the past two weeks, Israel has allowed fuel deliveries to Gaza only today. The Gaza Strip was totally isolated for over two weeks and no goods entered. Some reports indicate the genuine concern that we are approaching famine conditions.

How can one fail to speak of Israeli procedures, specifically under this agenda item, at a time when Israel has frozen the assets of the Palestinian Authority,

especially its income from the transport of Palestinian goods through Israel, estimated in the millions of dollars. How can we fail to speak of all these procedures at a time when the losses exceed $900 million — that is, three times the assistance provided by the donor countries? How can one speak of humanitarian assistance when Israel is avoiding and blocking the implementation of projects and programmes to improve the living conditions of the Palestinian people?

I do not want to add to the long list of Israeli violations, but the fundamental and pivotal cause of this crisis must be pointed out. Israel must understand and recognize that the root of this crisis is the continuation of its illegal military occupation. That is the crux of the issue. As soon as the illegal occupation ends, the region will be able to seek to improve the living conditions of its peoples and strengthen regional cooperation.

Another factor that very clearly inflamed the crisis was the existence of the settlements. I wish very briefly to summarize the settlement situation in Gaza. There are 5,000 illegal Israeli settlers in Gaza, occupying 40 per cent of the territory's land. This is a poor strip of land lacking sufficient water resources. A mere 5,000 settlers have 40 per cent of the land, while 1.2 million people must make do, in very difficult circumstances, with the other 60 per cent of Gaza's 30 square kilometres. I wished to cite this one example as evidence of the nature of the new apartheid system being implemented by the Israelis in the occupied territories.

I reiterate that the crux of the crisis is the occupation. As soon as the occupation ceases, living conditions for the Palestinian people will improve, and they will be able to live in freedom and dignity like other peoples of the world.

The President: I now call on the representative of Israel, who wishes to speak a second time in exercise of the right of reply.

Mr. Shacham (Israel): It appears that perhaps the self-evident logic of cause and effect continues to escape our Palestinian neighbours. Almost every speaker in today's debate has stressed the obvious negative impact of violence and conflict on social and economic well-being and humanitarian assistance. The case of the Palestinian decision to resort to violence and its consequent negative impact on the Palestinian economy and society is no exception. The obvious solution is negotiation and dialogue, rather than confrontation and violence. I would remind the Palestinian observer of what he must already know: the permanent disposition of the settlements and the disputed territories, which he raised in his reply, is part and parcel of this negotiation, and when the Palestinian violence has ended, the negotiations will again be able to resume. It would serve us all well to remember - and to remind those who have perhaps forgotten - the words of the ancient proverb: people who live in glass houses should not throw stones.

The President: I now call on the representative of Palestine, who wishes to speak a second time in exercise of the right of reply.

Mr. Jilani (Palestine) (*spoke in Arabic*): I shall be brief. I simply wanted to repeat that the most atrocious forms of violence and terrorism are the occupation by force of the territory of others and the imposition of military occupation on an entire people. The territories to which the representative of Israel referred are not the subject of dispute; they are occupied territories. Israel is the only State Member of the United Nations that has been singled out as an occupying Power.

(spoke in English)

It is the only State in the United Nations that has been named in 25 Security Council resolutions as "the occupying Power". These territories, which the representative of Israel referred to as "disputed", are, according to international law and Security Council resolutions, occupied territories. Israel must stop trying to shift the true concept of disputed territories — the territories that Israel is occupying beyond the 1947 partition plan — to include those that it occupied in 1967.

Programme of work

The President: I would like to inform members of some additions to the programme of work of the General Assembly.

On Wednesday morning, 29 November 2000, in addition to agenda item 38, "Zone of peace and cooperation of the South Atlantic", the General Assembly will also take up sub-item (i) of agenda item 17, "Appointment of the members of the Consultative Committee on the United Nations Development Fund

for Women", agenda item 33, "Culture of peace", to take action on draft resolution A/55/L.43; agenda item 37, "Implementation of the outcome of the World Summit for Social Development and of the special session of the General Assembly in this regard", to take action on draft resolution A/55/L.40; and agenda item 174, "The role of the United Nations in promoting a new global human order", to take action on draft resolution A/55/L.15/Rev.2.

The meeting rose at 5.35 p.m.